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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Model for America” or Incumbent Protection Plan?

Today, the Florida Senate debated and passed their maps to redraw Florida Senate and congressional districts. Calling the maps a "model for America," Sen. Mike Haridopolos (R-Merritt Island) chaired a debate where much criticism was levied about citizen groups who have worked for passage of redistricting rules, which Florida voters approved by 63 percent.

Today we set the record straight -- Florida citizens deserve the facts.

At public hearings statewide, members of the League of Women Voters of Florida, Common Cause and Democracia (now “National Council of La Raza”) and other citizens called on the Legislature to reveal their maps so that the public could analyze and comment on legislatively drawn maps likely to form the basis for the maps that might actually be passed.

The Legislature ignored this request and instead established an artificial deadline of Nov. 1 for submissions by the public, but still there were no legislatively produced maps available for the public to respond to. At committee meeting after committee meeting, it was obvious that the Senate Reapportionment Committee was cherry-picking public testimony and maps to justify their plans while ignoring input that did not conform to what they intended to do. It was also obvious that many decisions were being made to favor incumbents.

It was not until Nov. 28 that the Senate revealed the maps that it was considering, and not until Dec. 6 that they voted on Senate and congressional plans.

As soon as the Legislature’s proposed maps were available, the League of Women Voters of Florida, along with Common Cause and Democracia (now NCLR), performed a detailed analysis of the Senate proposals and determined that they do not comply with Amendments 5 and 6 and other legal requirements. We set out to prepare alternative and legally compliant maps, which we did in less than a month.

At that point, and within the time for amendments to be filed, our organizations sent legally compliant congressional and Senate plans to Sen. Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) (and all

members of the Senate Reapportionment Committee), along with the attached letter, asking that the Chair or any member offer our proposals as amendments. Not a single member — Republican or Democrat — was willing to offer up our maps for discussion. Yet today, members of the Senate majority excoriated our organizations for not participating in the process in the way they wanted us to.

All of the rhetoric about the timing of our groups' submission of maps is simply a smoke screen to obscure the fact that the Senate has now passed maps that do not comply with the applicable laws.

Members of the Senate, while complaining about the timing of our maps, also took the opportunity to express disapproval of our handling of minority districts. Like Sen. Arthenia Joyner (D-Tampa), we believe that the Senate's maps use the "pretext of minority protection to advance an agenda that seeks to preserve incumbency and pack minority seats in order to benefit a particular party." We reject the Senate's pretext.

"The party in power is trying to protect its ability to stay in power," said Leon Russell, vice chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "Some districts now contain a higher percentage of minority voters than needed to elect a candidate of their choice. This solidifies and perpetuates control."

Our Jan. 6 letter to Sen. Gaetz and the members of the Senate Reapportionment Committee is attached.

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January 6, 2012

Chairman Don Gaetz
Senate Reapportionment Committee
The Florida Senate
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: Congressional plan sp10c0039 and Senate plan sp10s0040

Dear Chairman Gaetz:

As you know, The League of Women Voters of Florida, Democracia, Inc., (now part of The National Council of La Raza), and Common Cause of Florida have been monitoring the redistricting process since it began. Throughout the process, we have been hopeful that the Legislature would follow its constitutional mandate to create maps that comply with the FairDistricts standards.

Since they were filed on December 6, 2011, we have had a chance to fully review the Senate's proposed Congressional and Senate redistricting plans, SB 1174 and SJR 1176. We believe these plans fail to adhere to the spirit and the letter of Florida's new constitutional requirements and, therefore, offer alternative Congressional and Senate redistricting plans which we have uploaded to your redistricting website. Our Congressional plan has been assigned number sp10c0039 and our Senate plan has been numbered sp10s0040. We hope you will consider supporting them.

Whether or not you favor our plans, it is our hope that you, as Chairman of the Committee, will extend a courtesy to our organizations by filing our Congressional and Senate redistricting plans as strike all amendments to SB 1174 and SJR 1176 and submitting them for a vote of the Senate Reapportionment Committee at its January 11 meeting.

If for some reason you are not willing to extend this courtesy, we request that another member of the Reapportionment Committee – whether they support our approach or not – submit our plans to bill drafting and offer them as amendments so they can be fully discussed and voted up or down.

The FairDistricts criteria – which were supported by 63% of Floridians – demand the thoughtful, principled and nonpartisan approach that our maps represent. In the spirit of

openness and fairness, we hope you will bring these maps forward as amendments at your January 11 meeting so the members of the committee can have a full opportunity to consider them.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter and please consider supporting the Congressional and Senate plans submitted by our organizations.

Sincerely,



Deirdre Macnab
LWV of Florida



Eric Rodriguez
National Council of La Raza



Peter Butzin
Common Cause of Florida

CC: All members of The Senate Reapportionment Committee